

Governor's Task Force on the Economic Status of Kentucky's Women

Preliminary Findings

December 4, 2002

The purpose of the Governor's Task Force on the Economic Status of Kentucky's Women (Task Force) was to examine the issues that are obstacles to the economic progress of Kentucky women, identify solutions, and develop a plan of action. Governor Paul E. Patton appointed this Task Force in November 2001 for one year because of the recognition that without strengthening Kentucky women, we cannot strengthen Kentucky.

More than 300 women and men from 55 Kentucky counties served on the five Issue Committees of the Task Force. These volunteers spent a full year – and more than 51,000 volunteer hours – on this groundbreaking project.

If there is any doubt about the need for this effort, consider that Kentucky:

- ranks 50th among the 50 states and the District of Columbia in health and well-being.
- ranks 49th among the 50 states and the District of Columbia in the percentage of women with four or more years of college.
- ranks 48th among the 50 states in women's political participation.
- ranks 47th among the 50 states and the District of Columbia in measures of women's economic and social autonomy.
- ranks 39th among the 50 states and the District of Columbia in women's median annual earnings.

Overall, **Kentucky is ranked the 3rd worst state for women**, according to the Institute for Women's Policy Research.

These low rankings impact the quality of life of all Kentuckians.

Kentucky already has a number of programs in place that are making a difference in the economic lives of women throughout the state, and the Task Force found that raising women's awareness of these programs would be the first step in improving women's economic status.

The Task Force found that, if the state is to make meaningful progress in this area, Kentucky must pursue new initiatives, new thinking and, indeed, a new vision for the economic status of women in Kentucky. The Task Force identified five areas in which Kentucky should make improvements:

- Economic sufficiency
- Education
- Equity
- Leadership
- Well-being

This report is a summary of the findings in each of these areas. In June of 2003, at the Summit on the Economic Status of Kentucky's Women, the Kentucky Commission on Women will release the full report of the Governor's Task Force on the Economic Status of Kentucky's Women. The final report will in fact be a plan of action, including specific recommendations that will serve as a guide for decision-makers throughout the Commonwealth.

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E conomic sufficiency

Training and education can be the keys to economic sufficiency. However, the vast majority of Kentucky women lack college degrees and this is part of the reason why so many women are stuck in low-paying jobs. It should be economically possible for all women to seek more education and training to help them in their search for better jobs.

At the same time, Kentucky does not have an adequate number of quality jobs that will lead to self-sufficiency for women at all education levels. Kentucky has also been slow to address the needs of women interested in becoming small business owners.

The Task Force found that:

- Half of the households headed by women in Kentucky have annual incomes of less than \$15,000. Working women with minimum wage jobs (\$5.15 per hour) would have to work an average of 71 hours a week to afford the rent for a two-bedroom apartment in Kentucky.
- When Kentucky women earn bachelor's degrees, their median income more than doubles, to \$35,000.
- There are not enough qualified women in leadership positions that influence the expansion of business and employment opportunities in Kentucky. An informal sampling of Kentucky counties found few women in leadership positions on local economic development boards (one of six in Mason County; four of 25 in Boyd County; zero of 15 on Tri-Ed Corporate board for Boone, Kenton and Campbell counties; zero of six in Laurel County; zero of six in Jessamine County; 10 of 86 for Greater Louisville Inc. board; four of 26 in Warren County).

E ducation

Education is critical to lifting families out of poverty, ensuring that women's contributions are valued, increasing political participation, and improving health and well-being.

Although Kentucky has made improvements in its public schools and colleges, the resources of this educational system are underutilized. Too many Kentuckians, especially females, are undereducated and inadequately prepared for postsecondary education. In addition, young girls lose interest and confidence in science, technology, engineering and math as early as middle school.

The Task Force found:

- Nearly all Kentucky counties (113 out of 120) have at least one postsecondary school within 30 miles, yet Kentucky ranks 49th in the nation for the number of women with four or more years of college. Rural women make up the majority of students attending the online Kentucky Virtual University, but unfortunately at this point very few programs or degrees are available entirely online.
- Just 16% of Kentucky women have received a bachelor's degree or higher, compared with 18% of men. While these numbers are changing, girls and boys in Kentucky continue to have very different career goals. About 41 percent of Kentucky boys who took the ACT in 2001 said they would be majoring in the fields of science, math, engineering or technology, compared with only 17 percent of girls. These majors have historically led to higher-paying jobs.
- In Kentucky men still earn more dental, medical, and law degrees. The majority of women's degrees are in fields that prepare them for lower-paying jobs. Only 18 percent of those in health-diagnosing professions

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(such as doctors) in Kentucky are women, while women make up 86.4 percent of those in health-assessment and treating occupations (such as nurses).

E quity

The wage gap between men and women is well documented, as is the fact that the wage gap is far greater for women of color. Less well known is that this gap actually increases with education, creating a disincentive for women to invest in more education with the hopes of get better-paying jobs. Furthermore, job fields that have traditionally been dominated by women (such as teaching and nursing) are undervalued and underpaid, and on average women are paid less than their male counterparts even in female-dominated jobs.

Women experience discrimination and harassment in the Kentucky workplaces, schools, sports activities, and throughout all facets of society. Gender discrimination is only part of the problem. Kentucky women also face discrimination based on race, ethnicity, age, disability and sexual orientation.

The Task Force found:

- Kentucky women with bachelor's degrees earn \$34,109 a year compared to \$48,580 earned by men with bachelor's degrees. The gap increases with education – women with doctoral degrees earn \$66,737 compared to men's \$112, 493.
- In a comparison of Kentucky men's and women's wages, even after controlling for factors commonly associated with causing the gender gap, a 12 percent gender gap remains.
- Women of color continue to fall behind white women in educational attainment, employment, access to services, and health care. For instance while the percentage of African-Americans with high school degrees in Kentucky is comparable to both white students and national averages, only 5.7 percent of African-Americans in Kentucky, compared with 16.6 percent nationwide, had earned a bachelor's degree or higher.

Leadership

In spite of small gains over the years, Kentucky women are still dramatically underrepresented in leadership positions at all levels in both the public and private sectors.

Due to economic and cultural barriers it is difficult for women to aspire to and achieve leadership positions. Women need greater opportunities to seek positions of power and more preparation for the challenges inherent in such positions.

The Task Force found that:

- The availability of leadership and mentoring is inconsistent across different regions of the state. In additions, there are not enough mentoring and leadership opportunities for women and girls of all ages, income levels, and ethnic and racial backgrounds.
- There is currently only one (1) female member of Congress representing the Commonwealth, four (4) women in the state Senate (11 percent of the total), and 11 women in the state House of Representatives (11 percent). There are no women of color in the Kentucky General Assembly. Furthermore, Kentucky ranks 48th in the nation on a composite index of political participation.
- Despite the valuable perspectives they can and do bring to the corporate table, women hold relatively few power positions in the private sector. Of the top Kentucky companies listed in the Fortune 500, 35 percent

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listed no women on their boards of directors, and 35 percent listed only one woman. Of companies in Jefferson County, 58 percent showed boards with no women directors.

- Surveys and interviews revealed that traditional beliefs continue to dampen and hamper women's ability to advance in the political and corporate realms. Seventy percent of Kentucky women responding to a research poll said they believed that one of the main reasons there are so few women in politics is that young girls are not inclined – or perhaps not actively encouraged – to aspire to political careers.

Well-being

Many Kentucky women are not able to further their education or find better jobs because they have more basic concerns, such as protecting themselves and their children from violent partners, finding appropriate housing, and/or coping with medical problems.

The Task Force found:

- More than 4 in 10 low-income mothers in Kentucky do not have health care coverage, even though the majority of those without coverage – 8 in 10 – are in working families. Overall, nearly 13 percent of Kentucky women were uninsured in 2000, a percentage that's expected to rise to 18 percent in 2006 and nearly 20 percent in 2010.
- The availability of transitional housing for domestic violence victims in Kentucky is practically nonexistent, according to a 2002 survey of spouse-abuse centers. Many of the 'available' units have very long waiting lists, and transitional housing resources "specifically designated" for domestic violence victims were reported to be lacking.
- No comprehensive program exists in Kentucky as a resource for low-income single women with no dependents between the ages of 40 and 62 (women formerly known as "displaced homemakers").
- In the last decade, Kentucky lawmakers have created major barriers to reproductive health services, especially for low-income women.

Conclusion

The full report of the Governor's Task Force on the Economic Status of Kentucky's Women will be released at the Summit on the Economic Status of Kentucky's Women on June 20-21, 2003. This report will offer specific recommendations for addressing the challenges outlined in this document. During the 2003 session of the General Assembly, there will be legislation filed that will be the first steps to addressing some of these issues.

If we are going to alter the course of the Commonwealth, we must address the issues and obstacles facing women and girls—over half the population. In order to move Kentucky forward we must set a new goal: to change Kentucky's status as the 3rd worst state in the nation, to *one of the top ten best states for women*.

Note: The findings in this report are based on research conducted by the committees of the Governor's Task Force on the Economic Status of Kentucky's Women. Sources included state and federal reports, surveys, interviews, research by national foundations and institutes and other resources. The full report will include an appendix listing the sources used in the research phase of the project.

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